



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Statement from Gwen McFarlin  
Hamilton County Democratic Party Chairwoman**

I remember when the name Ruehlman stood for good government in Cincinnati. Now, unfortunately, Judge Ruehlman is nothing more than a rubber stamp for Republican extremists like Chris Smitherman, Chris Finney and COAST -- his Republican friends who stand to benefit both politically and financially from his statements and his rulings. He has made a mockery of the court.

All five Councilmembers have admitted fault to violating Ohio's Sunshine Law. There is no denying their mistake.

Moving forward, we as a Party will do everything in our power to educate and emphasize the importance of operating within Ohio's rules and regulations. Transparency is paramount to serving our public well.

Now that this issue is behind us, we call on those involved in the drama -- from our local media to our elected officials -- to join us in refocusing time, energy, and resources to where it needs to be: the well-being of our City and its many residents.

The exploitation of this issue by far-right members of the Republican Party -- from Councilman Christopher Smitherman to prominent members of COAST -- is divisive politics at its worst. Our taxpayers and climate of civility suffered because they chose to exploit and elongate this issue.

Consider the people behind this:

- The Finney Law Firm, which has a long history of enriching themselves off taxpayer money: A firm that stands to collect approximately 90% of the taxpayer dollars that they accuse the Councilmembers of wasting.
- COAST: a local hate group that tweets about "hunting" black women.
- Councilmember Christopher Smitherman, who has spent an entire year tweeting, messaging, and going on right-wing radio to fan the flames of a story that serves no



other purpose than to influence an election that he wishes to participate in, which is still two and a half years away.

Together, it is clear that this matter stopped being about the Ohio Open Meetings law and became a politically motivated attack on dedicated public servants that enriched a right-wing law firm with taxpayer dollars.

We look forward to putting this issue behind us. That way, we can all get back to work.